

NEWS

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GLICKMAN BUILDING A LEGACY FOR CONSUMERS AND FARMERS WITH 1997 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19, 1997--Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today revisited the many accomplishments of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during 1997.

Looking back on a busy year, Agriculture Secretary Glickman recounted the Department's accomplishments, specifically advancing the war on hunger, taking America's conservation efforts to new levels, working to modernize and improve food safety, and creating a new day for civil rights at USDA.

Secretary Glickman said, "The public often perceives USDA as an agency that only serves a small number of people working on America's farms. Production agriculture is and will always be the heart of what we do at USDA, but what this Department has done during 1997 shows that the work we do affects every American -- on and off the farm -- every day. I am proud of the service that USDA has given our nation this year."

The milestones for the past year include:

-increasing production, trade, and opportunities for family farmers, USDA:

Efforts ensured that U.S. agriculture exports maintained near record levels of \$57.4 billion, the second highest rate ever. New markets for U.S. agriculture products were opened around the world, including rice to Honduras, pork to Venezuela, grapes to China, and tomatoes to Japan. In addition, the export surplus remained a robust \$21.6 billion.

Worked with farmers to ensure strong harvests in 1997. The wheat crop featured record yields in winter wheat, and was the largest overall wheat crop in the 1990s. The corn crop was the third largest ever, and soybean yields were at a record high.

Net farm income remains at near record levels with cash receipts totaling almost \$200 billion.

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Proposed the first federal regulations governing national organic agriculture standards. These rules strengthen one of the fastest growing segments of the agriculture economy. These standards will greatly expand market opportunities for America's small and medium-sized farmers.

Provided direct operating and farm ownership loans totaling \$233 million to 4,247 beginning farmers -- a 20 percent increase over FY 1996.

The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) approved the expansion of Crop Revenue Coverage (CRC), a privately developed revenue insurance product, for corn, cotton, grain sorghum and wheat. CRC is now available on almost 90 percent of the corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, and grain sorghum acres in the U.S.

Responded to natural disasters, including blizzards, droughts, flooding, and tornados, with emergency relief and funding.

Hosted 10 farmers' markets with vendors from seven states at USDA in Washington. Facilitated the establishment of an additional 23 farmers' markets in coordination with the Department of Energy, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Transportation.

-providing more tools for the wise stewardship of the land -- making CRP more environmentally sensitive and sound, and other conservation commitments, USDA:

Enrolled nearly 17 million acres of America's most environmentally sensitive lands for protection in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Started the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to build on CRP efforts and combine them with the goals and funding of state governments. The program was first established in Maryland targeting an additional 100,000 acres. Many additional states have applied to participate in CREP.

Accepted over 23,000 contracts, totaling \$171 million, providing cost-share assistance for conservation enhancements as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Announced the new National Conservation Buffer Initiative which will help landowners install 2 million miles of conservation buffers by the year 2002.

Sponsored the Lake Tahoe Summit, as part of President Clinton's commitment to this national treasure. The Summit improved environmental protection coordination between Federal, state, and tribal agencies.

-feeding more children and families, through making food recovery a national priority, and strongly supporting the WIC program, USDA:

Reached full funding for WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children), assisting 7.5 million mothers and their young children with healthy food and nutritional advice.

Obtained rebates for WIC state agencies on infant formula through cooperative bidding permitting 1.6 million additional participants and \$1.2 billion in savings.

Hosted the first National Food Recovery and Gleaning Summit to bring together public interest groups, the private sector, farmers and others, to discuss hunger and food recovery. Summit participants set a national goal of increasing food recovery by 33 percent. As part of a commitment at the Summit, the National Restaurant Association created a guide for food recovery which has been distributed to restaurants nationwide.

-setting a sweeping civil rights agenda for the Department, USDA:

Restaffed the civil rights enforcement unit and began work on the backlog of discrimination complaints -- resolving 141 complaints, including 11 major settlements.

Initiated new foreclosure and lending policies at USDA in an effort to assure that no one will lose their farm because of discrimination.

Provided direct operating loans totaling \$65 million to 1,927 socially disadvantaged farmers and direct farm ownership loans totaling \$15.5 million to 184 SDA farmers, exceeding the targeted allocation Congress set by 176 percent.

Increased the minority representation on FSA state committees by 10 percent over the past year -- 46 percent of the 222 FSA state committee members are now women and minorities.

Established the Office of Outreach to coordinate and provide leadership in delivering programs and services to USDA customers, particularly those groups who have been historically underserved.

Provided \$4.5 million from the Fund for Rural America for outreach to socially disadvantaged farmers.

Created the Small Farmers Commission to address the critical needs of small and socially disadvantaged farmers.

Established a new division of civil rights in the Office of the General Counsel. This office is charged with providing legal counsel and guidance to the Department on civil rights issues.

-raising consumer confidence with proposed food safety legislation that would work from farm to table, USDA:

Required all federally inspected meat and poultry processing plants to implement the first two elements of the new Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point inspection system to reduce human exposure to meat and poultry-borne pathogens.

Intensified research efforts into foodborne pathogens such as salmonella and E.coli.

Developed new micro-organisms that when added to feed for young chickens prevents salmonella from thriving. This technology, called "competitive exclusion" represents another important tool to assure a safe food supply for U.S. and export markets.

Unveiled "Fight Bac," a new national food safety education campaign, developed and supported by a public-private partnership of industry, government and consumer groups.

-creating jobs and economic revitalization in rural communities and making a downpayment on an information superhighway for rural America, USDA:

Invested more than \$60 million in the nation's three rural Empowerment Zones and 33 rural Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC), creating or saving over 7,000 jobs. More than 700,000 rural citizens now receive additional services in the EZ/ECs due to USDA loans, grants and programs.

Provided more than \$2.6 billion in loans, loan guarantees, or grants in rural housing and issued rental assistance to 40,000 rural, low-income households.

Financed the start-up or expansion of 1,183 rural business or cooperatives, creating or preserving more than 53,000 jobs.

Provided \$1.3 billion in loans and grants for 1,125 rural water or wastewater projects that serve 8.5 million people.

Loaned \$380 million for 79 rural telecommunications projects providing service to 211,000 rural households and businesses. These enhancements are making advanced telecommunications projects such as the Internet available to more rural families than ever before.

Provided almost \$17 million in loans and grants for distance learning and telemedicine projects, to expand educational and medical opportunities to America's rural communities.

Glickman said, "Looking back on 1997, I am proud of the work we've done. USDA has given the American people some rather significant gifts -- safer food, a stronger anti-hunger effort, a sustainable path for agriculture's future, and a core commitment to civil rights ensuring dignity for all of our customers and employees. I am proud of the work of the people's department in 1997. And on behalf of the USDA family, I want to wish all of you and your families a joyous holiday season."

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